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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD

Letter dated 21 March 2002 from the Permanent Mission of Azerbaijan to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

I have the honour to transmit herewith the information of the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan entitled "KHOJALY TRAGEDY: Evidence from independent sources".

I would be grateful if you could circulate the present letter and the attached information* as an official document of the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on Human Rights under item 9 of the agenda.

(Signed): Murad N. NAJAFOV
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

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KHOJALY TRAGEDY

Evidence from independent sources

Over the night from 25 to 26 February 1992 Armenian armed forces with support of the infantry guards regiment No 366 of the former Soviet Union implemented the capture of the Khojaly city situated in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan.

The population (about 2500 people) remained in the city were forced to leave their houses in the hope to find the way to the nearest place mainly populated by Azerbaijanis.

But these plans have failed. Invaders destroyed Khojaly and with particular brutality implemented carnage over the peaceful population of the city.

Brutal annihilation of hundreds of blameless inhabitants of Khojaly was one of the most heinous crimes against the people of Azerbaijan. The armed forces of Armenia and mercenary units spared virtually none of those who had been unable to flee Khojaly and the surrounding area. As a result of genocide in Khojaly, 613 persons were killed and 1,275 peaceful inhabitants taken hostage. The fate of 150 persons remains unknown to this day. In the course of the tragedy 487 peaceful inhabitants were more or less severely maimed. Among those killed were 106 women, 83 children and 70 elderly people. The maimed included 76 children not yet of age. 6 families were completely wiped out, 26 children lost both parents, and 130 children one of their parents. Of those who perished, 56 persons were killed with especial cruelty: by burning alive, scalping, beheading, gouging out of eyes, and bayoneting of pregnant women in the abdomen.

At the same time, Armenia denies its responsibility for crimes committed against the population of Khojaly, airily falsifying facts and sharing own interpretations of them, which deviate not only from reality but also from elementary logic. In this regard the «truths» about the events in Khojaly, as set out in document E/CN.4/2001/155, circulated by the request of the Permanent Representative of Armenia at the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on Human Rights, represent yet another an attempt to mislead the world community. Nevertheless, even the subtlest propaganda will never manage to disprove the facts that speak of a situation diametrically opposite to that represented by the Armenian side.

The falsification, contained in document E/CN.4/2001/155, is not a single attempt of Armenia to decline responsibility for crimes in Khojaly. In this regard the following excerpts from the letter by Holly Cartner, Executive Director of Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, of 24 March 1997 addressed to Alexander Arzoumanian, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, attract particular attention:

«As Executive Director of Human Rights Watch/Helsinki (formerly Helsinki Watch), I wish to respond to the March 3 Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement regarding the 1992 slaughter of Azeri civilians in the town of Khojaly in Nagorno Karabakh. In it, the Ministry argues that the Popular Front of Azerbaijan was responsible for the civilian deaths, supporting this argument by referring to an interview with former President Ayaz Mutalibov and, incredibly, to a 1992 report by our organization. The report, Bloodshed in the Caucasus: Escalation of the Armed Conflict in Nagorno Karabakh, documents violations of humanitarian law in the conflict committed by both Azerbaijani and Karabakh Armenian forces. Neither our overview and version of the events, nor the individual interviews with Azeri refugees from Khojaly and other villages in Nagorno Karabakh published in the report could possibly support the notion that Azerbaijani forces willfully prevented the evacuation of civilians or that they shot their own citizens. We are deeply distressed that the Ministry has, wittingly or unwittingly, linked our report to views which we reject and which our report does not reflect.

Yet we place direct responsibility for the civilian deaths with Karabakh Armenian forces. Indeed, neither our report nor that of Memorial includes any evidence to support the argument that Azerbaijani forces obstructed the flight of, or fired on Azeri civilians.

We welcome the use of our reports by governments and intergovernmental organizations, and we sincerely hope that there will be no further misrepresentation regarding the contents of our 1992 report».

Human rights protection organizations and mass media have also reported about the events in Khojaly. The reports given below represent independent and impartial views with respect to the tragedy of Khojaly.

Azerbaijan publishing house, Baku, 1992

KHOJALY – THE LAST DAY

In the words of the journalist Chingiz Mustafaev, among the dead were «... dozens upon dozens of children between 2 and 15 years old, women and old people, in most cases shot at pointblank range in the head. The position of the bodies indicated that the people had been killed in cold blood, calculatedly, without any sign of a struggle or of having tried to escape. Some had been taken aside and shot singly; many had been killed as whole families at once. Some corpses displayed several wounds, one of which was invariably in the head, suggesting that the wounded had been finished off. Some children were found with severed ears; the skin had been cut from the left side of an elderly woman's face; and men had been scalped. There were corpses that had clearly been robbed. The first time we arrived at the scene of the shootings of 28 February, accompanied by two military helicopters, we saw from the air an open area about one kilometer across which was strewn with corpses almost everywhere ...».

An inhabitant of Khojaly, Djanan Orudjev, also provided information on the many victims, chiefly women and children. His 16-year-old son was shot, and his 23-year-old daughter with her twin children and another, 18-year-old daughter who was pregnant, were taken hostage.

Saria Talybova, who witnessed the bloody tragedy as it unfolded, watched as four Meskhetian Turks, refugees from Central Asia, and three Azerbaijanis were beheaded on the grave of an Armenian soldier, and children were tortured and killed before their parents' eyes; two Azerbaijanis in national army uniform had their eyes put out with screwdrivers.

The organized nature of the extermination of the people of Khojaly was further evident from the fact that the peaceful inhabitants who fled the town in desperation to save their lives were killed outside it in previously prepared ambushes. For example, Elman Mamedov, chief of administration in Khojaly, reported that a large group of people who had left Khojaly came under heavy fire from Armenian light and heavy machine-guns and armoured personnel carriers near the village of Nakhichevanik. Another resident of Khojaly, Sanubar Alekperova, said she would never forget the mountains of corpses of women, children and old people near Nakhichevanik, where they fell into an ambush: in the carnage, her mother and her two daughters, Sevinzh and Khidzhran, were killed and she herself was wounded. Faced with this mass shooting-down of unarmed people, some of the group made for the village of Gyulably, but there the Armenians took some 200 people hostage. Among them was Dzhamil Mamedov; the Armenians tore out his nails, beat him about the legs and head and took away his grandson, and his wife and daughter vanished without trace.

«I had heard a lot about wars, about the cruelty of the Fascists, but the Armenians were worse, killing five- and six-year-old children, killing innocent civilians», said a French journalist, Jean-Yves Junet, who visited the scene of this mass murder of women, old people, children and defenders of Khojaly.

One of the French journalist's Russian colleagues, V.Belykh, a correspondent for the newspaper *Izvestia*, reported seeing bodies with their eyes gouged out or ears cut off and bodies that had been scalped or beheaded.

The head of the Azerbaijan Defence Ministry's medical service, Khanlar Hajiyev was horrified by the evidence of savage reprisals against the inhabitants of Khojaly brought before him: a guardsman with his intestines hanging out, people with frostbite, a child whose leg had been torn off by heavy machine-gun fire, a girl whose face had been slashed with a knife.

Major Leonid Kravets reported that he had «personally seen about 200 bodies» and that with him had been a local policeman who, «when he saw his four year-old son lying among the dead with his head split open, went out of his mind with grief».

The Washington Post, 28 February 1992

NAGORNO-KARABAKH VICTIMS BURIED IN AZERBAIJANI TOWN -- REFUGEES CLAIM HUNDREDS DIED IN ARMENIAN ATTACK

By Thomas GOLTZ, Agdam, Azerbaijan, 27 February

Officials of the main mosque in this town just east of the embattled enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh said they buried 27 bodies today, brought from an Azerbaijani town inside the enclave that was captured Wednesday by Armenian militiamen.

Refugees fleeing the fighting in Khojaly, a town of 6,000 northeast of the enclave's capital, Stepanakert, claimed that up to 500 people, including women and children, were killed in the attack. No independent estimate of deaths was available here. The Agdam mosque's director, Said Sadikov Muan, said refugees from Khojaly had registered the names of 477 victims with his mosque since Wednesday.

Officials in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, estimated the deaths in Khojaly at 100, while Armenian officials in their capital, Yerevan, said only two Azerbaijanis were killed in the attack. An official from Baku said here that his government fears Azerbaijanis would turn against it if they knew how many had been killed.

Of seven bodies seen here today, two were children and three were women, one shot through the chest at what appeared to be close range. Another 120 refugees being treated at Agdam's hospital include many with multiple stab wounds.

The Armenians who attacked Khojaly Tuesday night «were shooting, shooting, shooting», said Raisa Aslanova, who reached Agdam Wednesday night. She said her husband and a son-in-law were killed and her daughter was missing.

Among the refugees who fled here over the mountains from Nagorno-Karabakh were two Turkmen soldiers from former Soviet Interior Ministry forces who had taken refuge in Khojaly after deserting from their unit last Friday because, they said, Armenian non-commissioned officers had beaten them «for being Muslims».

The two deserters claimed their former unit, the 366th Division, was supporting the Armenian militiamen who captured Khojaly. They said they tried to help women and children escape. «We were bringing a group through the mountains when the Armenians found us and opened fire», said Agamehmet Mutif, one of the deserters. «Twelve were killed».

The Independent, 29 February 1992

By Helen Womack

Elif Kaban, a Reuter correspondent in Agdam, reported that after a massacre on Wednesday, Azeris were burying scores of people who died when Armenians overran the town of Khojaly, the second-biggest Azeri settlement in the area. «The world is turning its back on what's happening here. We are dying and you are just watching», one mourner shouted at a group of journalists.

The Sunday Times, 1 March 1992

ARMENIAN SOLDIERS MASSACRE HUNDREDS OF FLEEING FAMILIES

By Thomas Goltz, Agdam, Azerbaijan

Survivors reported that Armenian soldiers shot and bayoneted more than 450 Azeris, many of them women and children. Hundreds, possibly thousands, were missing and feared dead.

The attackers killed most of the soldiers and volunteers defending the women and children. They then turned their guns on the terrified refugees. The few survivors later described what happened: «That's when the real slaughter began», said Azer Hajiev, one of three soldiers to survive. «The Armenians just shot and shot. And then they came in and started carving up people with their bayonets and knives».

«They were shooting, shooting, shooting», echoed Rasia Aslanova, who arrived in Agdam with other women and children who made their way through Armenian lines. She said her husband, Kayun, and a son-in-law were massacred in front of her. Her daughter was still missing.

One boy who arrived in Agdam had an ear sliced off.

The survivors said 2000 others, some of whom had fled separately, were still missing in the gruelling terrain; many could perish from their wounds or the cold.

By late yesterday, 479 deaths had been registered at the morgue in Agdam, and 29 bodies had been buried in the cemetery. Of the seven corpses I saw awaiting burial, two were children and three were women, one shot through the chest at point blank range.

Agdam hospital was a scene of carnage and terror. Doctors said they had 140 patients who escaped slaughter, most with bullet injuries or deep stab wounds.

Nor were they safe in Agdam. On Friday night rockets fell on the city which has a population of 150,000, destroying several buildings and killing one person.

The Times, 2 March 1992

CORPSES LITTER HILLS IN KARABAKH

Anatol Lieven comes under fire while flying to investigate the mass killings of refugees by Armenian troops

As we swooped low over the snow-covered hills of Nagorno-Karabagh we saw the scattered corpses. Apparently, the refugees had been shot down as they ran. An Azerbaijani film of the places we flew over, shown to journalists afterwards, showed dozens of corpses lying in various parts of the hills.

The Azerbaijanis claim that as many as 1000 have died in a mass killing of Azerbaijanis fleeing from the town of Khodjaly, seized by Armenians last week. A further 4,000 are believed to be wounded, frozen to death or missing.

The civilian helicopter's job was to land in the mountains and pick up bodies at sites of the mass killings.

The civilian helicopter picked up four corpses, and it was during this and a previous mission that an Azerbaijani cameraman filmed the several dozen bodies on the hillsides.

Back at the airfield in Agdam, we took a look at the bodies the civilian helicopter had picked up. Two old men and small girl were covered with blood, their limbs contorted by the cold and rigor mortis. They had been shot.

***The Washington Times*, 2 March 1992**

ARMENIAN RAID LEAVES AZERIS DEAD OR FLEEING

About 1,000 of Khojaly's 10,000 people were massacred by the Armenian Army in Tuesdays attack. Azerbaijani television showed truckloads of corpses being evacuated from the Khocaly area.

***The New York Times*, Tuesday, 3 March 1992**

MASSACRE BY ARMENIANS

Agdam, Azerbaijan, March 2 (Reuters) - Fresh evidence emerged today of a massacre of civilians by Armenian militants in Nagorno-Karabakh, a predominantly Armenian enclave of Azerbaijan.

Scalping Reported

Azerbaijani officials and journalists who flew briefly to the region by helicopter brought back three dead children with the back of their heads blown off. They said shooting by Armenians has prevented them from retrieving more bodies.

«Women and children have been scalped», said Assad Faradshev, an aide to Nagorno-Karabakh's Azerbaijani Governor. «When we began to pick up bodies, they began firing at us».

The Azerbaijani militia chief in Agdam, Rashid Mamedov, said: «The bodies are lying there like flocks of sheep. Even the fascists did nothing like this».

Truckloads of Bodies

Near Agdam on the outskirts of Nagorno-Karabakh, a Reuters photographer, Frederique Lengaigne, said she had seen two trucks filled with Azerbaijani bodies.

«In the first one I counted 35, and it looked as though there were as many in the second», she said. «Some had their head cut off, and many had been burned. They were all men, and a few had been wearing khaki uniforms».

The Times, 3 March 1992

MASSACRE UNCOVERED

By Anatol LIEVEN

More than sixty bodies, including those of women and children, have been spotted on hillsides in Nagorno-Karabakh, confirming claims that Armenian troops massacred Azeri refugees. Hundreds are missing.

Scattered amid the withered grass and bushes along a small valley and across the hillside beyond are the bodies of last Wednesday's massacre by Armenian forces of Azerbaijani refugees.

In all, 31 bodies could be counted at the scene. At least another 31 have been taken into Agdam over the past five days. These figures do not include civilians reported killed when the Armenians stormed the Azerbaijani town of Khodjaly on Tuesday night. The figures also do not include other as yet undiscovered bodies

Zahid Jabarov, a survivor of the massacre, said he saw up to 200 people shot down at the point we visited, and refugees who came by different routes have also told of being shot at repeatedly and of leaving a trail of bodies along their path. Around the bodies we saw were scattered possessions, clothing and personnel documents. The bodies themselves have been preserved by the bitter cold which killed others as they hid in the hills and forest after the massacre. All are the bodies of ordinary people, dressed in the poor, ugly clothing of workers.

Of the 31 we saw, only one policeman and two apparent national volunteers were wearing uniform. All the rest were civilians, including eight women and three small children. Two groups, apparently families, had fallen together, the children cradled in the women's arms.

Several of them, including one small girl, had terrible head injuries: only her face was left. Survivors have told how they saw Armenians shooting them point blank as they lay on the ground.

BBC1 Morning News at 07.37, Tuesday, 3 March 1992

BBC reporter was live on line and he claimed that he saw more than 100 bodies of Azeri men, women and children as well as a baby who are shot dead from their heads from a very short distance.

BBC1 Morning News at 08:12, Tuesday, 3 March 1992

Very disturbing picture has shown that many civilian corpses who were picked up from mountain. Reporter said he, cameraman and Western Journalists have seen more than 100 corpses, who are men, women, children, massacred by Armenians. They have been shot dead from their heads as close as 1 meter. Picture also has shown nearly ten bodies (mainly women and children) are shot dead from their heads. Azerbaijan claimed that more than 1000 civilians massacred by Armenian forces.

The Washington Times, 3 March 1992

ATROCITY REPORTS HORRIFY AZERBAIJAN

By Brian KILLEN Agdam, Azerbaijan

Dozens of bodies lay scattered around the killing fields of Nagorno-Karabakh yesterday, evidence of the worst massacre in four years of fighting over the disputed territory.

Azeri officials who returned from the scene to this town about nine miles away brought back three dead children, the backs of their heads blown off.

At the local mosque, six other bodies lay stretched out, fully clothed, with their limbs frozen in the positions in which they were killed. Their faces were black from the cold.

«Telman!» screamed one woman, beating her breast furiously over the body of her dead father, who lay on his back with his stiff right arm jutting into the air.

Those who returned from a brief visit by helicopter to Khojaly, captured by the Armenians last week, said they had seen similar sights--only more. One Russian journalist said he had counted about 30 bodies within a radius of 50 yards from where the helicopter landed.

Armenia has denied atrocities or mass killings of Azeris after its well-armed irregulars captured Khojaly, the second-biggest Azeri town in Nagorno-Karabakh, last Wednesday. Azerbaijan says 1,000 people were killed.

«Women and children had been scalped», said Assad Faradzhev, an aide to Karabakh's Azeri governor.

Mr. Faradzhev said the helicopter, bearing Red Cross markings and escorted by two MI-24 helicopters of the former Soviet army, succeeded in picking up only the three children before Armenian militants opened fire. «When we began to pick up bodies, they started firing at us», he said.

Mr. Faradzhev said they were on the ground for only 15 minutes.

«The combat helicopters fired red flares to signal that Armenians were approaching and it was time to leave. I was ready to blow myself up if we were captured», he said pointing to a grenade in his coat pocket.

Reuters photographer Frederique Lengaigne saw two trucks full of Azeri corpses near Agdam.

«In the first one, I counted 35, and it looked as though there were almost as many in the second. Some had their heads cut off and many had been burned. They were all men, and a few had been wearing khaki uniforms», she said.

In Agdam's mosque, the dead bodies lay on mattresses under a naked light bulb. People screamed insults at Azerbaijan's president, Ayaz Mutalibov, saying he had not done enough to protect Karabakh's Azeri population.

Hundreds of people crowded outside chanting Islamic prayers. Some wept uncontrollably and collapsed near their dead relatives, brought to the town by truck only minutes earlier.

Chilling film of dozens of stiffened corpses scattered over a snowy hillside backed accounts of the slaughter of women and children sobbed out by refugees who made it safely out of the disputed Caucasus enclave.

Azerbaijani television showed pictures of one truckload of bodies brought to the Azeri town of Agdam, some with their faces apparently scratched with knives or their eyes gouged out. One little girl had her arms stretched out as if crying for help.

«The bodies are lying there like flocks of sheep. Even the fascists did nothing like this», said Agdam militia commander Rashid Mamedov, referring to the Nazi invaders in World War II.

«Give us help to bring back the bodies and show people what happened», Karabakh Gov. Musa Mamedov pleaded by telephone to the Soviet army base in Gyandzha, Azerbaijan's second-largest city.

A helicopter pilot who took cameramen and Western correspondents over the area reported seeing some corpses lying around Khojaly and dozens more near the Askeran Gap, a mountain pass only a few miles from Agdam.

The New York Times, 3 March 1992

MASSACRE BY ARMENIANS BEING REPORTED

Agdam, Azerbaijan, March 2 (Reuters)--The last of the former Soviet troops in the Caucasus enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh began pulling out today as fresh evidence emerged of a massacre of civilians by Armenian militants.

The Itar-Tass press agency said the 366th Motorized Infantry Regiment had started its withdrawal, in effect removing the last frail buffer separating the region's two warring ethnic groups, Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

The two sides made no attempt to interfere, it added.

Nagorno-Karabakh is within the Republic of Azerbaijan, but most of its population is Armenian.

Shelling in town reported

The Azerbaijani press agency Azerinform reported fresh Armenian missile fire on the Azerbaijani-populated town of Shusha in Nagorno-Karabakh on Sunday night. It said several people had been wounded in another attack, on the settlement of Venjali, early today.

The Republic of Armenia reiterated denials that its militants had killed 1,000 people in the Azerbaijani-populated town of Khojaly last week and had massacred men, women and children fleeing the carnage across snow-covered mountain passes.

But dozens of bodies scattered over the area lent credence to Azerbaijani reports of a massacre.

Azerbaijani officials and journalists who flew briefly to the region by helicopter brought back three dead children with the backs of their heads blown off. They said shooting by Armenians had prevented them from retrieving more bodies.

«Women and children had been scalped», said Assad Faradzhev, an aide to Nagorno-Karabakh's Azerbaijani Governor. «When we began to pick up bodies, they began firing at us».

The Azerbaijani militia chief in Agdam, Rashid Mamedov, said: «The bodies are lying there like flocks of sheep. Even the fascists did nothing like this».

Two trucks filled with bodies

Near Agdam on the outskirts of Nagorno-Karabakh, a Reuters photographer, Frederique Lengaigne, said she had seen two trucks filled with Azerbaijani bodies.

«In the first one I counted 35, and it looked as though there were almost as many in the second», she said. «Some had their heads cut off, and many had been burned. They were all men, and a few had been wearing khaki uniforms».

Ethnic violence and economic crisis threaten to tear apart the Commonwealth of Independent States, created by 11 former Soviet republics in December. The commonwealth has been powerless in the face of the ethnic hatred rekindled in the age-old dispute between Christian Armenia and Muslim Azerbaijan, which are members.

Four years of fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh have killed 1,500 to 2,000 people. The last week's fighting has been the most savage yet.

The 366th Regiment, based in Stepanakert, the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh, has been caught at the center of fighting in which at least three of its soldiers were killed late last month.

Speaking to his Parliament in Yerevan, the Armenian capital, President Levon Ter-Petrosyan criticized the withdrawal from the enclave of the commonwealth's last troops.

«This regiment, though not involved in military operations, was a stabilizing factor», Mr. Ter-Petrosyan said.

***The Boston Globe*, 3 March 1992**

By Paul QUINN-JUDGE, Baku, Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan charged yesterday that Armenian militants massacred men, women and children after forcing them from a town in Nagorno-Karabagh last week.

Azerbaijani officials said 1000 Azeris had been killed in town of Khojaly and that Armenian fighters then slaughtered men, women and children fleeing across snow-covered mountain passes.

Armenian officials disputed the death toll and denied the massacre report.

Journalists on the scene said it was difficult to say exactly how many people had been killed in surrounding areas. But a Reuters photographer said he saw two trucks filled with Azeri corpses, and a Russian journalist reported massacre sites elsewhere in the area.

Azeri officials and journalists who flew briefly to the region by helicopter recovered the bodies of three dead children who had been shot in the head, Reuters said, but Armenians prevented them from retrieving more bodies.

...

There were growing signs that many civilians were killed during the capture of Khojaly.

Footage shot by Azerbaijan Television Sunday showed about 10 dead bodies, including several women and children, in an improvised morgue in Agdam. An editor at the main television station in Baku said 180 bodies had been recovered so far. A helicopter flying over the vicinity is reported to have seen other corpses, while the BBC quoted a French photographer who said that he had counted 31 dead, including women and children, some who appeared as though they were shot in the head at close range.

Meanwhile, the mayor of Khojaly, Elmar Mamedov, said at a news conference in Baku that 1000 people had died in the attack, 200 more were missing, 300 had been taken hostage, and 200 were injured. Armored personnel carriers of the 366th spearheaded the attack, Mamedov charged, and cleared the way for Armenian irregulars...

***The Age*, Melbourne, 6 March 1992**

By Helen WOMACK, Agdam, Azerbaijan, Thursday

The exact number of victims is still unclear, but there can be little doubt that Azeri civilians were massacred by Armenian Army in the snowy mountains of Nagorno-Karabakh last week.

Refugees from the enclave town of Khojaly, sheltering in the Azeri border town of Agdam, give largely consistent accounts of how Armenians attacked their homes on the night of 25 February, chased those who fled and shot them in the surrounding forests. Yesterday, I saw 75 freshly dug graves in one cemetery in addition to four mutilated corpses we were shown in the mosque when we arrived in Agdam late on Tuesday. I also saw women and children with bullet wounds in a makeshift hospital in a string of railway carriages.

Khojaly, an Azeri settlement in the enclave mostly populated by Armenians, had a population of about 6000. Mr. Rashid Mamedov, Commander of Police in Agdam, said only about 500 escaped to his town. «So where are the rest?» Some might have taken prisoner, he said, or fled. Many bodies were still

lying in the mountains because the Azeris were short of helicopters to retrieve them. He believed more than 1000 had perished, some of cold in temperatures as low as minus 10 degrees.

When Azeris saw the Armenians with a convoy of armoured personnel carriers, they realized they could not hope to defend themselves, and fled into the forests. In the small hours, the massacre started.

Mr. Nasiru, who believes his wife and two children were taken prisoner, repeated what many other refugees have said - that troops of the former Soviet army helped the Armenians to attack Khojaly. «It is not my opinion, I saw it with my own eyes».

The New York Times, 6 March 1992

A FINAL GOODBY IN AZERBAIJAN

[Photo by Associated Press]: «At a cemetery in Agdam, Azerbaijan, family members and friends grieved during the burial of victims massacred by the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabagh. Chingiz Iskandarov, right, hugged the coffin containing the remains of his brother, one of the victims. A copy of Koran lay atop the coffin».

The Washington Post, 6 March 1992

FINAL EMBRACE

[Photo by Associated Press]: «Chingiz Iskenderov, right, weeps over coffin holding the remains of his brother as other relatives grieve at an Azarbaijani cemetery yesterday amid burial of victims killed by Armenians in Nagorno-Karabagh».

The Sunday Times, 8 March 1992

Thomas Goltz, the first to report the massacre by Armenian soldiers, reports from Agdam.

Khojaly used to be a barren Azeri town, with empty shops and treeless dirt roads. Yet it was still home to thousands of Azeri people who, in happier times, tended fields and flocks of geese. Last week it was wiped off the map.

As sickening reports trickled in to the Azerbaijani border town of Agdam, and the bodies piled up in the morgues, there was little doubt that Khojaly and the stark foothills and gullies around it had been the site of the most terrible massacre since the Soviet Union broke apart.

I was the last Westerner to visit Khojaly. That was in January and people were predicting their fate with grim resignation. Zumrut Ezoya, a mother of four on board the helicopter that ferried us into the town, called her community «sitting ducks, ready to get shot». She and her family were among the victims of the massacre by the Armenians on February 26.

«The Armenians have taken all the outlying villages, one by one, and the government does nothing», Balakisi Sakikov, 55, a father of five, said. «Next they will drive us out or kill us all», said Dilbar, his wife. The couple, their three sons and three daughters were killed in the massacre, as were many other people I had spoken to.

«It was close to the Armenian lines we knew we would have to cross. There was a road, and the first units of the column ran across then all hell broke loose. Bullets were raining down from all sides, we had just entered their trap».

The Azeri defenders picked off one by one. Survivors say that Armenian forces then began a pitiless slaughter, firing at anything moved in the gullies. A video taken by an Azeri cameraman, wailing and crying as he filmed body after body, showed a grizzly trail of death leading towards higher, forested ground where the villagers had sought refuge from the Armenians.

«The Armenians just shot and shot and shot», said Omar Veyselov, lying in hospital in Agdam. «I saw my wife and daughter fall right by me»

People wandered through the hospital corridors looking for news of the loved ones. Some vented their fury on foreigners: «Where is my daughter, where is my son?» wailed a mother. «Raped. Butchered. Lost».

***Le Mond*, Paris, 14 March 1992**

The foreign journalist in Aghdam saw the women and three scalped children with the pulled off nails among the killed people. This is not «Azerbaijani propaganda», but reality.

***Newsweek*, 16 March 1992**

THE FACE OF A MASSACRE

By Pascal Privat with Steve Le Vine in Moscow

Azerbaijan was a charnel house again last week: a place of mourning refugees and dozens of mangled corpses dragged to a makeshift morgue behind the mosque. They were ordinary Azerbaijani men, women and children of Khojaly, a small village in war-torn Nagorno-Karabakh overrun by Armenian forces on Feb. 25-26. Many were killed at close range while trying to flee; some had their faces mutilated, others were scalped. While the victims' families mourned.

***Time*, 16 March 1992**

MASSACRE IN KHOJALY

By Jill SMOLOWE
Reported by Yuri ZARAKHOVICH/Moscow

While the details are argued, this much is plain: something grim and unconscionable happened in the Azerbaijani town of Khojaly two weeks ago. So far, some 200 dead Azerbaijanis, many of them mutilated, have been transported out of the town tucked inside the Armenian-dominated enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh for burial in neighboring Azerbaijan. The total number of deaths - the Azerbaijanis claim 1,324 civilians have been slaughtered, most of them women and children - is unknown...

Videotapes circulated by the Azerbaijanis include images of defaced civilians, some of them scalped, others shot in the head...

Svoboda, 12 June 1992

A TRAGEDY WHOSE PERPETRATORS CANNOT BE VINDICATED

A report by Memorial, the Moscow-based human rights group, on the massive violations of human rights committed in the taking of Khojaly on the night of 25-26 February 1992 by armed units

The report of Memorial on the massive violations of human rights committed in the taking of Khojaly says of the civilians' flight from the town: «The fugitives fell into ambushes set by the Armenians and came under fire. Some of them nonetheless managed to get into Agdam; others, mostly women and children (exactly how many it is impossible to say), froze to death while lost in the mountains; others still, according to testimony from those who reached Agdam, were taken prisoner near the villages of Pirdzhamal and Nakhichevanik. There is evidence from inhabitants of Khojaly who have already been exchanged that some of the prisoners were shot ... Around 200 bodies were brought into Agdam in the space of four days. Scores of the corpses bore traces of profanation. Doctors on a hospital train in Agdam noted no less than four corpses that had been scalped and one that had been beheaded. State forensic examinations were carried out in Agdam on 181 corpses (130 male and 51 female, including 13 children): the findings were that 151 people had died from gunshot wounds, 20 from shrapnel wounds and 10 from blows inflicted with a blunt instrument ... The records of the hospital train in Agdam, through which almost all the injured inhabitants or defenders of Khojaly passed, refer to 598 cases of wounds or frostbite (cases of frostbite being in the majority) and one case of live scalping».

The Independent, London, 12 June 1992

By Frederique LENGAIGNE/Reuter

Aref Sadikov sat quietly in the shade of a cafe-bar on the Caspian Sea esplanade of Baku and showed a line of stitches in his trousers, torn by an Armenian bullet as he fled the town of Hojali just over three months ago, writes Hugh Pope.

«I'm still wearing the same clothes, I don't have any others», the 51-year-old carpenter said, beginning his account of the Hojali disaster. «I was wounded in five places, but I am lucky to be alive».

Mr. Sadikov and his wife were short of food, without electricity for more than a month, and cut off from helicopter flights for 12 days. They sensed the Armenian noose was tightening around the 2,000 to 3,000 people left in the straggling Azeri town on the edge of Karabakh.

«At about 11pm a bombardment started such as we had never heard before, eight or nine kinds of weapons, artillery, heavy machine-guns, the lot», Mr. Sadikov said.

Soon neighbours were pouring down the street from the direction of the attack. Some huddled in shelters but others started fleeing the town, down a hill, through a stream and through the snow into a forest on the other side.

To escape, the townspeople had to reach the Azeri town of Agdam about 15 miles away. They thought they were going to make it, until at about dawn they reached a bottleneck between the two Azeri villages of Nakhchivanik and Saderak.

«None of my group was hurt up to then ... Then we were spotted by a car on the road, and the Armenian outposts started opening fire», Mr. Sadikov said. Mr. Sadikov said only 10 people from his group of 80 made it through, including his wife and militiaman son. Seven of his immediate relations died, including his 67-year-old elder brother.

«I only had time to reach down and cover his face with his hat», he said, pulling his own big flat Turkish cap over his eyes. «We have never got any of the bodies back».

The first groups were lucky to have the benefit of covering fire. One hero of the evacuation, Alif Hajief, was shot dead as he struggled to change a magazine while covering the third group's crossing, Mr Sadikov said.

Another hero, Elman Memmedov, the mayor of Hojali, said he and several others spent the whole day of 26 February in the bushy hillside, surrounded by dead bodies as they tried to keep three Armenian armoured personnel carriers at bay.

As the survivors staggered the last mile into Agdam, there was little comfort in a town from which most of the population was soon to flee.

«The night after we reached the town there was a big Armenian rocket attack. Some people just kept going», Mr. Sadikov said. «I had to get to the hospital for treatment. I was in a bad way. They even found a bullet in my sock».

Victims of massacre: An Azeri woman mourns her son, killed in the Hojali massacre in February (left). Nurses struggle in primitive conditions (centre) to save a wounded man in a makeshift operating theatre set up in a train carriage. Grief-stricken relatives in the town of Agdam (right) weep over the coffin of another of the massacre victims. Calculating the final death toll has been complicated because Muslims bury their dead within 24 hours.

***The Independent*, London, 12 June 1992**

PAINFUL SEARCH

The gruesome extent of February's killings of Azeris by Armenians in the town of Hojali is at last emerging in Azerbaijan - about 600 men, women and children dead.

The State Prosecutor, Aydin Rasulov, the cheif investigator of a 15-man team looking into what Azerbaijan calls the «Hojali Massacre», said his figure of 600 people dead was a minimum on preliminary findings. A similar estimate was given by Elman Memmedov, the mayor of Hojali. An even higher one was printed in the Baku newspaper *Ordu* in May - 479 dead people named and more than 200 bodies reported unidentified. This figure of nearly 700 dead is quoted as official by Leila Yunusova, the new spokeswoman of the Azeri Ministry of Defence.

Francois Zen Ruffinen, head of delegation of the International Red Cross in Baku, said the Muslim imam of the nearby city of Agdam had reported a figure of 580 bodies received at his mosque from Hojali, most of them civilians. «We did not count the bodies. But the figure seems reasonable. It is no fantasy», Mr. Zen Ruffinen said. «We have some idea since we gave the body bags and products to wash the dead».

Mr. Rasulov endeavours to give an unemotional estimate of the number of dead in the massacre. «Don't get worked up. It will take several months to get a final figure», the 43-year-old lawyer said at his small office.

Mr. Rasulov knows about these things. It took him two years to reach a firm conclusion that 131 people were killed and 714 wounded when Soviet troops and tanks crushed a nationalist uprising in Baku in January 1990.

Officially, 184 people have so far been certified as dead, being the number of people that could be medically examined by the republic's forensic department. «This is just a small percentage of the dead», said Rafiq Youssifov, the republic's chief forensic scientist. «They were the only bodies brought to us. Remember the chaos and the fact that we are Muslims and have to wash and bury our dead within 24 hours».

Of these 184 people, 51 were women, and 13 were children under 14 years old. Gunshots killed 151 people, shrapnel killed 20 and axes or blunt instruments killed 10. Exposure in the highland snows killed the last three. Thirty-three people showed signs of deliberate mutilation, including ears, noses, breasts or

penises cut off and eyes gouged out, according to Professor Youssifov's report. Those 184 bodies examined were less than a third of those believed to have been killed, Mr. Rasulov said.

«There were too many bodies of dead and wounded on the ground to count properly: 470-500 in Hojali, 650-700 people by the stream and the road and 85-100 visible around Nakhchivanik village», Mr. Manafov wrote in a statement countersigned by the helicopter pilot.

«People waved up to us for help. We saw three dead children and one two-year-old alive by one dead woman. The live one was pulling at her arm for the mother to get up. We tried to land but Armenians started a barrage against our helicopter and we had to return»

There has been no consolidation of the lists and figures in circulation because of the political upheavals of the last few months and the fact that nobody knows exactly who was in Hojali at the time - many inhabitants were displaced from other villages taken over by Armenian forces.

***Коммерсантъ*, Moscow, 27 February 2002**

Over the night from 25 to 26 February 1992 the Khojaly town (Nagorny Karabakh), inhabited mainly by Azerbaijanis, was subjected to the massive attack from the Armenian side. The units of the Russian 366th infantry guards regiment took part in the attack. As a result, 613 persons dead, 487 wounded, 1275 imprisoned, 150 persons are missing. The Khojaly events have radically changed the nature of the conflict – afterwards the military operations from both sides have actually turned into ethnic cleansings.

Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, December 1994

SEVEN YEARS OF CONFLICT IN NAGORNO KARABAKH

According to Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, «the massacre of hundreds of Azeri civilians in Khojali, NKAO, by Karabakh forces with alleged support of the 366th Regiment of the Russian army» was one of the major events characterized the war in 1992.

«In February 1992, Karabakh Armenian forces – reportedly backed by soldiers from the 366th Motor Rifle Regiment of the Russian Army – seized the Azeri-populated town of Khojali... More than 200 civilians were killed in the attack, the largest massacre to date in the conflict».[28]

Footnote: [28] «There are no exact figures for the number of Azeri civilians killed because Karabakh Armenian forces gained control of the area after the massacre. While it is widely accepted that 200 hundred Azeris were murdered, as many as 500-1000 may have died».